

PROTECTING THE CHILDREN OF MAINE
by the
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
May 12, 2006

SAFEGUARD was initiated during the summer of 2005. The State Police partnered with the Maine Association of Police Chiefs, Maine Sheriffs Association, the Secretary of State, and the Bureau of Highway Safety. Police officers are encouraged to report serious violations involving teenagers to their parents and the reception has been extremely positive. Parents have been notified of teenagers driving or riding in a motor vehicle involved in dangerous driving, teenagers found at a location where underage drinking is taking place and of teens exhibiting aggressive driving or excessive speeding. The program's motto is "Your parents will be the first to know." The majority of parents contacted have been very supportive and appreciative.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY - The Maine Sex Offender Registry is now averaging 575,000 hits a month and is the most visited site on the State of Maine's web page. State Police maintain the registry, which began in 1992 and went on line in December of 2003. There are now over 2200 registered sex offenders in Maine and their photos, addresses and history are on the web site. Many of those on the list were convicted of sexual activity with children and the response from the public has been overwhelming positive to the information contained on the registry. In November of 2005, Maine became the 33rd state to join the National Sex Offender Public Registry that links our site with the other states.

COMPUTER CRIMES TASK FORCE is a division within the Bureau of State Police and the majority of their work has been uncovering child pornography and the exploitation of children on the World Wide Web. The task force continues to deal with a significant backlog of over 120 hard drives seized from Maine locations. It takes about 60 hours to analyze the average hard drive because of the thousands of images on each one. Since being created in 2000, the task force has analyzed hundreds of computers, the majority containing hard-core prepubescent sex exploitation. In March of 2006, out-of-state investigators found 645 instances in which child pornography was being shared with Maine Internet users.

SEAT BELTS AND CHILD SAFETY SEATS are a major part of Public Safety's efforts to keep children safe. Our Bureau of Highway Safety makes a continued effort to encourage the use of seat belts and child safety seats. For the past three years the Bureau has spearheaded a major enforcement-education effort in May to promote seat belt usage for all occupants of motor vehicles. The State Police, being the largest police agency in Maine, has been a partner in these initiatives and Maine's safety belt usage increased to 75.8% in 2005 as a result of these combined efforts.

HIGHWAY FATALITIES - Maine has made significant strides in highway safety in recent years. 2005 was the safest year on Maine roads since 1982, but young drivers continue to be involved in a large number of the fatal crashes. In 2005, 38% of Maine's highway deaths involved a young driver and 25% of the 169 people killed in crashes were under the age of 24.

SAFE - State Police continued Strategic Area Focused Enforcement (SAFE) with assistance from the Maine Department of Transportation and the Bureau of Highway Safety. SAFE targets high crash and violation areas with increased State Police enforcement. Highway speed enforcement has been increased by utilizing the State Police aircraft to assist troopers on the ground. Among the major roads targeted in the SAFE campaign during the year were I-295, I-95, Route 4 in Androscoggin County and Route 111 in York County.

DRIVER EDUCATION – The Bureau of Highway Safety sponsored specialized training in seat belt usage to over 700 driver's education students during the year in partnership with Mid Coast EMS. That same program also reached more than 3000 other high school students and over 1000 elementary students. In addition, the seat belt message reached thousands of others attending health fairs, agricultural fairs, bicycle safety events and other public events using the Bureau's mechanical Convincer and Rollover demonstrators.

IMPAIRED DRIVING - Maine's drunk driving enforcement efforts have been a success story since 1980, when 60% of fatal crashes in Maine were alcohol related. With new laws, stricter enforcement and a change in public attitude, that number has consistently dropped over the past 25 years. In 2005, the impaired driving figure was 32.5% of fatal crashes, and 15 of those crashes involved young drivers with a positive blood alcohol count. Drinking and driving on the part of young drivers continues to get the attention of Maine law enforcement, including State Police and the Bureau of Highway Safety. In 2004, 1797 drivers between the ages of 15 and 21 were arrested statewide for operating under influence or 18% of the total number of drivers cited for OUI during that year.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT – For the first time in Maine, drug deaths exceeded motor vehicle fatalities during 2005, 169 highway deaths vs. 190 fatal drug overdoses. Eleven of those OD deaths were young people under the age of 21. The Maine Drug Enforcement Agency (MDEA) is the statewide agency whose sole effort is to reduce and disrupt the drug supply in Maine to all age brackets, including Maine young people. Although the majority of MDEA's investigative efforts focus on adults, marijuana, cigarettes and alcohol are gateway drugs available to Maine's youth and most adult abusers say they started with one or all of those three substances as teenagers. During 2005, MDEA made 43 of its 626 arrests within a Maine school zone and 198 of the total arrests were those under the age of 25. Of those 198 arrests, 94 were involved cocaine and crack and 69 involved heroin and synthetic narcotics.

METH LABS – Drug agents located three Methamphetamine labs inside Maine homes during the first four months of the year. The labs, which are highly combustible and dangerous, were located in Lewiston, Auburn and Caribou and all three buildings also had children living inside. Other parts of the country have seen huge increases in these seizures and MDEA and the Maine Attorney General's Office fear the numbers in Maine are destined to increase. MDEA has also partnered with the Maine Office of Substance Abuse in the development of the Meth Watch Program that raises awareness of business leaders and Maine residents of the threat posed by Methamphetamine and its production.

The Department of Public Safety along with the U.S. Attorney's Office, Maine Attorney General's Office and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services are co-sponsoring a conference in June on drug endangered children. The comprehensive two-day training on June 29 & 30, 2006 will feature nationally recognized experts addressing illegal Methamphetamine use and production and how it relates to children who may be exposed. Participants will include police involved in child crimes and abuse investigations, child protective and family services caseworkers, medical professionals, state and federal prosecutors, probation officers, judges, victim service providers, emergency first responders, educators and substance abuse treatment providers.

JUVENILE FIRE SETTERS – The State Fire Marshal's Office continues to work with local fire departments around Maine to identify and seek counseling for very young children who are fascinated with fire. During the first four months of 2006, 2 of the 8 fire deaths in Maine were young boys who were playing with matches. At present the counties of York, Cumberland and Androscoggin are the most active in fire setter intervention. More juveniles are arrested in Maine for arson than adults.

PUBLIC BUILDING INSPECTIONS – The State Fire Marshal's Office inspects all public buildings in Maine where children congregate: primarily schools, day care centers and foster homes. The inspections are to make sure the buildings are in compliance with life safety codes and free of fire hazards. In addition, the Office also inspects amusement rides at parks and agricultural fairs before they can operate.

LIQUOR LICENSING – The Division of Liquor Licensing works closely with local police departments and sheriff's offices to monitor the illegal sale and serving of alcohol to minors. Once a violation has been determined, we take administrative action against the license holder, usually resulting in fines and sometimes the suspension of their liquor license. During 2005, 58 notices of such violations were issued and during the first four months of 2006 that number has already reached 70.

UNDERAGE DRINKING – We have partnered with the Maine Office of Substance Abuse and the Attorney General's Office and participated in a number of community forums across the state. The meetings have been well received by community members who have attended. Our Division of Liquor Licensing also reviews the text of liquor-related advertising to make sure it does not encourage underage drinking or depict underage consumers.

CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS – The Criminal Division of the State Police investigate a number of child abuse cases each year. This is in addition to their main role of investigating homicides and suspicious deaths. During 2005, detectives investigated 193 cases in Maine involving child sexual, physical and other types of abuse.

MAINE EMS EFFORTS - The Maine Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (MEMS) has been receiving a federal Emergency Medical Services for Children grant since 1996. Projects that have been funded with this grant include:

Youth Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training Program – MEMS was the primary funding and training source for this program when it first started. Under this project state and private agencies developed a program for EMS providers, educators and community leaders in identifying and getting help for children (and adults) who attempted or were contemplating suicide.

Emergency Response for Maine schools – MEMS developed an online guide for school nurses and other school personnel to aid in responding to emergency situations. This was developed in collaboration with the Dept. of Education and the guide has been very well received.

Emergency planning for health clinics and doctor's offices – Many clinics and doctor's offices were surprisingly unprepared for dealing with emergency situations that either happened in their offices or were brought to their offices. This program provided training to assist clinical and administrative personnel in developing procedures to use in such circumstances.

Regional and local injury prevention teams – These teams have worked collaboratively across the state to collect information on numerous injury prevention programs including:

Playground Safety – provided training for school personnel to identify and correct safety issues.

Sports Injuries – working with athletic trainers and coaches to collect information about sports related injuries and sharing information about common injuries and prevention.

EMS for Children with Special Health Care Needs – this is a new program that works with parents of children with special health care needs. Helps the parents connect with EMS services and develop plans in case emergency care or evacuation transportation is needed.

AMBER ALERT – State Police and the Maine Association of Broadcasters launched the Amber Alert system in December of 2002 and fortunately have not had to use it. The program would utilize the state's emergency alert system to broadcast information on every Maine TV and radio station about the abduction of a child under the age of 18. The Maine Lottery Commission joined the effort in December of 2005 and Amber Alerts will now be forwarded to Maine's 1400 stores that sell lottery tickets, in addition to the TV and radio broadcast.

CHILDREN'S CABINET – The Department of Public Safety has been an active participant in the Governor's Children's Cabinet, both at the state and regional levels, for several years. First Lady Karen Baldacci chairs the current state cabinet. Commissioner Cantara and Assistant to the Commissioner Janet D. Richards participate in the children's cabinet.